

NAVIGATING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES: HOW TEACHERS CAN
SUPPORT SELF-IDENTIFIED MULTI-ETHNIC STUDENTS

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Education Studies
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

June, 2015

An Abstract of the Thesis of

**Aimee Jones-Suematsu for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Education Studies to be taken June, 2015**

**Title: NAVIGATING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES: How Teachers Can Support Self-
Identified Multi-Ethnic Students**

Approved: 

Alison Schmitke

This thesis examines the school experiences of multi-ethnic backgrounds. Four college-aged students were interviewed for this project as well as two local k-12 teachers. Using a multicultural education lens, interviews were analyzed to understand how curriculums in schools affect students from a multi-ethnic background.

The observation from this thesis is that curriculums that use critical pedagogy, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching benefit students greatly. However, for students who identify with more than one race and culture there is more teachers can do to create an inclusive space for all students. Teacher education and curriculums must broaden to include ideas of multi-ethnicity and multi-raciality to provide support for all students.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Schmitke for supporting me throughout this project. Without her guidance and patience with me during this journey, writing this thesis would have been a much larger struggle. I would also like to thank my mother, Setsumi, for always standing by my side and providing the moral support when I needed it the most. I am thankful to have had wonderful professors and my program that exposed me to the ideas of social justice and the importance of having critically minded teachers. Lastly, I would like to thank the members of the Multi-Ethnic Student Alliance for providing a safe space on campus for me to express myself and opening the door to the conversations about mixed race issues.

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Introduction

What are you? This is a question that is asked to many multi-ethnic Americans. The number of self-identified multi-ethnic people has slowly increased over the years, to where many do not fall perfectly into neat little boxes that categorize race and ethnicity. According to the 2010 U.S Census, citizens who identify with two or more races rose by 32% from the 2000 census data. In Oregon the number in 2010 rose by 38.2% compared to the 2000 census data. (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011, p. 4) Many struggle to find a balance of the mix of culture they embody within themselves. It is a journey of self-discovery that is continuous and identity that is fluid and never quite concrete.

As a multi-ethnic person, I have felt the joys and pains of being a part of two worlds. From a young age I was proud to be Japanese, I could use chopsticks, speak the language and understand the customs. However as I got older I learned that to others, I never looked Asian enough. To many Americans I got anything from being a White American to being asked if I was Latina. On the flip side, when Japanese people got to know me, they assumed I was White and not Japanese at all. This exclusion from both worlds was very vivid to me as a young student and I often dreamed of an island where everyone was like me.

Within schools things like standardized tests that asked for my race were always hard to fill out. Usually the prompt would ask to check one box that corresponds with your race. I would always mark both Asian and White on my test, because I couldn't deny either of my identities. The other thing about school that

bothered me was the way that the curriculum never reflected who I was. Even history and literature would be separated into different racial categories! I remember during middle school learning about each different minority group at a different time of the year. Instead of learning how the different movements intersected, I was taught that Civil Rights Movement was an African American movement and that is was separate from the Chicano Civil Rights movement. Then the Asian American Civil Rights movement was again different from those other movements. To me as a multi-ethnic person, I did not understand why these different movements could not intersect. I am a physical embodiment of intersecting cultures, why couldn't my schooling reflect that?

Schools are experiencing an increase in students who self-identify as multi-ethnic. For example according to the Oregon Statewide Report Card 2012-13, in the school year of 2011-12 the number of multi-ethnic students rose by 2,674 to become a total of 26,441 students. In the 2012-13 school year this number rose by 1,607 to become a total of 28,048 students (Saxon, 2013, p. 4). However, the teachers in Oregon are still overwhelmingly white. In the 2012-13 school year, while 35.3% of students identified with a minority group, minority teachers were only 8.3% of the teaching force (Saxon, 2013, p. 6). This number changed only by 0.1% from the year before and has not increased at the same rate as the minority students. This growing disparity between the number of teachers of color and students of color is worrisome, because while the student population becomes more diverse the teacher population is not reflecting this trend.

Summary of the Study

Purpose

My own experiences being multi-ethnic led me to meet with other students who also identified similarly. While I have friends from all different backgrounds, when I meet someone else who is also mixed race, we share a moment of understanding of the struggles that we have both gone through as mixed race. Sometimes we hit it off great and become fast friends, while other times it doesn't completely work out. At University of Oregon, these friendships became a pathway to create a student group on campus for self-identifying multi-ethnic students. The reason why I created the Multi-Ethnic Student Alliance (MESA) with my friends at the end of my freshman year was because I felt lonely on campus. As a freshman, I tried to join different groups such as the Asian Pacific American Student Union and the Japanese Student Organization. However, when I was with the group members, I found that I was never viewed as fully Asian and I felt that I could not fit in completely. For various reasons, I decided that these groups were not for me. Then one day my new friend came up to ask me if I wanted to create my own student group with other mixed race individuals on campus. The idea was tantalizing and I knew that I had to be a part of the group. My sophomore year was the one where MESA started to have meetings.

These meetings became a safe place to discuss mixed race issues and the fantastic yet sometimes taxing experiences of being multicultural. The

conversations held within and outside of these meetings have led me to become more aware of the intersectionalities of race, class, gender, and sex.

Within the Educational Foundations major at the University of Oregon, I became exposed to curriculum theory that helped me look critically at what we teach our students kindergarten through high school. Through the coursework of the major, I gained information of what multicultural and inclusive classrooms look like and why it is so important for our students today. This newfound knowledge resonated with my own desire for inclusive classrooms. I then began to wonder about what the literature said about multicultural education in terms of multi-ethnic people. This led to creation of my thesis topic.

How can teachers support these students if they do not reflect the experiences of their students? The Oregon data clearly shows that there is a growing difference in the number of students of color to teachers of color. The purpose of this project was to better understand the experiences of multi-ethnic students and to use the knowledge gained from this project to improve my own teaching skills to incorporate into my future classroom.

Research Questions

In order to fully understand the experiences of my fellow multi-ethnic students I had to come up with questions that would help me understand what is being done in education to address the diverse needs of students and what was being experienced in the classroom. The questions are:

1. What do teachers in the United States do today to provide multicultural and inclusive education?
2. What is the schooling experience of multi-ethnic students in the United States?
3. How can multicultural education be improved to include all student experiences?

Using these questions I organized my thesis to around the ideas of “What? So What? Now What?”. This thesis discusses what is currently being done in the field of curriculum studies to address the diverse needs of the students. It shows the benefits that multicultural education has for all students. In my thesis I also look at what is missing from multicultural education. These observations stem from the interviews I conducted on other multi-ethnic students and their own experiences in schools. By the end of this thesis I aim to provide suggestions on how to address the concept of multi-ethnicity and include multi-ethnic students fully into the curriculum.

This thesis is divided up into seven chapters. Chapter 2 is my literature review where I explain what tools I will be using to analyze my data. In Chapter 3 I will discuss my methods of gaining my data. Chapter 4 will focus on my first thesis

question of what teachers are currently doing with multicultural education.

Chapter 5 will focus on the experiences of the 4 multi-ethnic students that I interviewed for my thesis. Chapter 6 will be answering my question of “Now what? What can teachers do?” In this chapter I draw upon what the interviewees would say to their teachers about inclusivity and expand the definition of multicultural education.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching critically listens to and affirms a minority voice that challenges the status quo. Instead of forcing assimilation and acceptance of dominant culture, it reexamines cultural assumptions and values and considers their larger ramifications (Cowhey, 2006, p. 13).

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the framework through which I analyze my data. Through my studies within the Educational Foundations major, I became exposed to the theories of critical pedagogy, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching. This chapter also includes a brief history of multi-ethnic people in the United States. Using these frameworks and the history, I examine critically what multi-ethnic students face in our schools, in what ways they are succeeding and what ways they are being held back.

History of Multi-Ethnic People in the United States

This section briefly discusses the evolving multi-ethnic identity within the history of the United States. I felt that providing the history was important to show how multi-ethnic individuals have been a part of our history since the beginning of colonization, and treatment of these individuals has not always been equal or fair. Examining the history is important for me as a future educator to understand the historical background that my students will bring with them. Examining the history also has allowed me to understand the different terminology that different people within this group use.

The history of multi-ethnic and multi-racial Americans dates back to when the first European settlers arrived on the shores of America. Inter-racial

relationships happened and multi-racial children were born, however many of these relationships were not voluntary and the children were results of rape. Most of these children suffered the fate of the non-White parent whether they were free or slaves (Douglas, n.d., para. 3). By 1667 the first laws against interracial marriage are set down in Maryland.

That whatsoever free-born [English] woman shall intermarry with any slave... shall serve the master of such slave during the life of her husband; and that all the issue of such free-born women, so married shall be slaves as their fathers were (Bacon's Rebellion, n.d.).

Some historians argue that due to collaboration between indentured Whites and enslaved Blacks, during the Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, there became a need to develop the "White" identity. "When it comes to black history, however, the main effect was the end of indentured servitude. The ruling class in Virginia was terrified of white and black servants uniting and changed the hardened slave policy along racial lines" (Johnson, 2013, p. 1). It was not until 1967 with the Loving v. Virginia case that the US Supreme Court invalidated the laws prohibiting interracial marriage. However, it was not for another 12 years before the first viable multiracial organizations first began to emerge. Soon many more organizations were created, for example, Biracial Family Network of Chicago, Multiracial American of Southern California, Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), Hapa Issues Forum, Interracial Family Circle of Washington, D.C. These organizations provided a safe space for people of multi-ethnic background and their families. Eventually, families of multiracial background felt that a national

advocacy organization would be best way to promote their concerns and issues, and so the Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans (AMEA) was formed (Douglas).

One of the many issues that faced these organizations was the US census not taking into account people of multi-racial background. By ignoring multi-ethnic identity, the census served to erase parts of peoples' identities as well as ignore the relationships between two or more races. AMEA and other organizations fought for a category that was labeled multi-racial so that the census could more accurately portray America, however this was met with opposition from other more traditional civil rights organizations. Eventually these differences came to a solution that on the new 2000 US Census, people could "check one or more" boxes. This change led to almost 7 million Americans self-identifying with more than one race (Douglas, n.d., para. 9). This number has continued to grow and by 2010 around 9 million Americans self-identified as two or more races (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011, p. 4).

Today, there are many more student organizations and other local groups that celebrate the mixed-identity experience. Many college campuses, like the University of Oregon, now host multi-ethnic student groups as well as reach out to other campuses and host conferences. For example, here at the University of Oregon, along with some of my friends, we started the Multi-Ethnic Student Alliance. It's mission reads as, "The mission of MESA is to provide a safe space for students with more than one ethnic identity to empower, reinforce and educate each other" (MESA homepage, n.d.). Within the MESA community we discuss the experiences that we face as multi-ethnic individuals. I have come to understand

that though I identify as multi-ethnic, I may have a different experience from that of my peers who also label themselves similarly in regards to the intersectionalities within identities. Another local group in the Eugene area is the H.O.N.E.Y (Honoring our New Ethnic Youth). This group provides a safe space for multi-ethnic families and works to build a community. The multi-ethnic community has also begun to expand with their terminology to include others who feel multi-ethnic, but may not be multi-racial. This may mean that while a person may not have parents of two or more racial backgrounds, due to their family or lifestyle they feel they are culturally multi-ethnic. Some examples are people who identify as trans-racial adoptees as well as third culture kids- people who grew up in a different country due to their parents' jobs. For example, University of Oregon's Multi-Ethnic Student Alliance states, "We define multi-ethnicity as anybody who has more than one ethnic identity. Examples include multiracial people, transracial adoptees, and people with intercultural families" (MESA homepage, n.d.). These groups continue to work and advocate on behalf of people and families of multi-ethnic background to address various needs, such as health and political issues.

Terminology

Within this thesis I will be using the term "multi-ethnic" to discuss the idea of multiple ethnic identities. However, most of the students I talked to identified as multiracial. I decided to use multi-ethnic because I feel that the term is more inclusive to all students who may feel that they have multiple identities, but may

not be recognized as multi-racial. I use the Multi-Ethnic Student Alliance's description of multi-ethnic to inform whom I include in my thesis. For example, within my interviews I had one participant who was not multi-racial, however she felt multi-ethnic due to a difference in home culture and her school culture. While being multi-racial is the surface representation of multi-ethnicity, multi-ethnicity is also inclusive to groups who do not fit the profile of multi-racial.

Critical Race Theory

Before I discuss critical pedagogy, multicultural education, and culturally responsive teaching, it is important to also look at critical race theory. Critical race theory, "is a movement born out of critical legal studies seeking to address issues of racial inequality and the overlooked role that race and racism have played in the construction of the legal foundation" (Howard, 2010, 98). Critical race theory states that due to historical and societal influences, racism is interwoven into the legal framework of the United States. In the context of education, the theory is extended to state that in fact within the education systems racism and marginalization of races are also interwoven. The theory begins by presupposing that racism has played a role in education. Critical race theory then is able to provide a framework to ask the question of "How has racism contributed to educational disparities, and how can it be dismantled" (Howard, 2010, 99). Critical race theory is important, because it uses the intersections of various oppressions to find answers to the question above. Also, critical race theory calls upon educators to find ways to challenge the dominant narrative and draw upon the

knowledge of ethnic and women's studies to fully understand the various types of discrimination.

Critical Pedagogy

"Critical pedagogy teaches us to name, to reflect critically, and to act" (Wink, 1997, p. 17). This reflection and action duo is very important in education. Paulo Freire said that true dialogue, must have two dimensions: reflection and action (Flinders & Thorton, 2013, p.157). In the classroom this dialogue allows for students to develop their own meanings of concepts on top of what the teacher teaches them. These meanings are reflections of the lived experiences and paradigms of the students. For multi-ethnic students, their life experiences are different from many monoracial students and therefore having a curriculum where they are able to build upon their own experiences, greatly supports them within the classroom. Critical pedagogy allows for students to develop literacy not only in reading the word but also in reading the world. Being able to read the world is to understand "how and why knowledge and power are constructed by whom. For whom." (Wink, 1997, 44). Learning how to read the world allows for students to become critical of what has been accepted as "normal" and see the power dynamics within different oppressed groups. Freire warned of an education system that used a banking model. The banking model is an education system that is described as treating students as empty receptacles to be filled. The banking model does not take into account previous knowledge that students may bring into the classroom. In Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he states, "in their desire to

obtain the support of the people for revolutionary action, revolutionary leaders often fall for the banking line of planning program content from the top down.”(Flinders & Thorton, 2013, pg.160). This quote highlights the dangers of the banking system and how easy it is to fall into such system. Critical pedagogy is needed in schools, because by including multiple voices of students and parents, school can become safer spaces for all students. Safe spaces in schools means that all students will feel welcome and that no one will feel threatened by perceived threats. This includes threats that are physical and emotional.

Multicultural Education

According to Nieto and Bode (2008), multicultural education is “a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students” (p. 44). The purpose of multicultural education is to challenge the different forms of discrimination that permeates society. Nieto and Bode frame multicultural education with seven basic characteristics. Multicultural education is antiracist, it is basic education, it is important for all students, it is pervasive, it is for social justice, it is a process, and it is critical pedagogy. The critical pedagogy mentioned here relates back to the words of Paulo Freire. Freire states that dialogue has two dimensions, that is reflection and action. Without these two dimensions, true dialogue is impossible.

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming---between those who deny other men the right to speak

their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them
(Flinders & Thorton, 2013, p. 157).

This quote shows that in order for people to truly have dialogue, it is important to allow for other understanding of the world. The quote reflects the idea that individuals see the world through the lens of their own experiences. However, Friere pointed out that each of these views is valid and valuable in providing true dialogue. Nieto and Bode (2008) state that, “knowledge taught in our schools tends to reflect the lowest common denominator---that which is sure to offend the fewest (and the most powerful) and is least controversial” (p. 55). This shows that our curriculum does not allow for all stories to be told and heard. Therefore there is no true dialogue in the Freirian sense.

Antiracist education implies that our teachers and students must first understand the concept of race and also know how to continuously work against.

It is essential to keep the antiracist nature of multicultural education in mind because, in many schools, even some that espouse a multicultural philosophy, only superficial aspects of multicultural education are apparent. Celebrations of ethnic festivals are the extent of multicultural education programs in some schools (Nieto & Bode, 2006, 45).

This example of what some schools consider multicultural education programs are what in our teacher preparation course we are encouraged to avoid. There is a difference between multicultural education and celebration of diversity, “Because many people erroneously assume that a school’s multicultural program automatically takes care of racism, we stress that multicultural education *must be consciously antiracist*” (Nieto & Bode, 2006, 45).

Nieto and Bode state that, “Multicultural literacy is just as indispensable for living in today’s world as reading, writing, arithmetic, and computer literacy” (2006, p. 48). Our world does not function in a monoracial or monocultural vacuum. Knowing this, developing an understanding of multicultural perspectives allows students to have access to multiple outlooks and ways to understand the same situation. For example, listening to a news story from multiple sources is a way to develop and strengthen critical thinking and understanding of multiple ways of thinking. Multicultural education should be pervasive and available in all aspects of the curriculum. It should become a way of thinking and doing to inform the actions of the whole school, rather than being limited to a classroom or one teacher.

In this way, multicultural education can be a mode for social justice. “Developing a multicultural perspective means learning how to think in more inclusive and expansive ways” (Nieto & Bode, 2006, p. 53). Nieto and Bode also highlight that it is not enough to discuss social justice issues in the classroom; students should also have the opportunity to take action in social justice issues. An example of this social justice piece of multicultural education can be found in Mary Cowhey’s work in her classroom. Cowhey works with her young students to not only facilitate discussion, but also take action for social justice issues. In her book, *Black Ants and Buddhists* (2006), Cowhey describes how her students in response to the 9/11 attacks, proposed that they get involved through a strike against the war and protest for peace. Instead of having students focus on how American lives were lost during the attacks, Cowhey encourages the students to think of people in

the world affected by violence and how they can use their actions to encourage peace.

Nieto and Bode argue that multicultural education is a process (p.54). Through this process new knowledge is being shared and developed. It is also argued that it is process “because it primarily involves relationships among people. The sensitivity and understanding teachers show their students are more crucial in promoting student learning than the facts and figures” (p. 54). Through this sharing, multicultural education is also critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy allows for students and teachers question the dominant or accepted narrative. Critical pedagogy also allows for critical thinking of “why and what we are doing. Whose interest is it in that we study what we study?” (Au, 2009, p. 12). This critical thinking ties back into the social justice piece of multicultural education.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is another way to discuss multicultural education. The components of culturally responsive teaching are very similar to multicultural education, however culturally responsive teaching focuses on affirming and validating the experiences of our students of color. Compared to multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching focuses on the benefits to the individual student, by emphasizing focused understanding of the individual student. Culturally responsive teachings follows three criteria: One, learn meaningful academic knowledge, skills, and dispositions; two, affirm their cultural identity and heritage; three, become more critically aware and prepared to

challenge inequities in and beyond school (Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011, p. 3). This quote shows the connection culturally responsive teaching has to the social justice piece of Nieto and Bode's description of multicultural education. Nieto and Bode, state that multicultural education is for social justice, and by using its teachings it helps students develop an understanding for multiple perspectives of the world. "Developing a multicultural perspective means learning how to think in more inclusive and expansive ways, reflecting on what is learned, and applying that learning to real situations" (Nieto & Bode, 2006, p. 53).

Genava Gay states that there are different characteristics of culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory (Gay, 2000, p. 29-36). To make sure culturally responsive teaching is validating, Gay states that, "It teaches *to and through* the strengths of these students. It is culturally *validating and affirming* (p. 29). By validating and affirming the cultures of the students, the teacher in turn creates a safe space within the classroom for all students to share their experiences.

Comprehensive education within the context of culturally responsive teaching means that the students from diverse backgrounds are affirmed within their experiences and that expectations and skills are integrated throughout the whole curriculum. The students are responsible not only for their own learning, but the learning of their peers as well. "They are expected to internalize the value that learning is a communal, reciprocal, interdependent affair, and manifest it habitually in their expressive behaviors" (Gay, 2000, p. 30).

Similar to how Nieto and Bode state that multicultural education is pervasive; Gay states that culturally responsive teaching is multidimensional. “Multidimensional culturally responsive teaching encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques and performance assessments” (2000, p. 31).

Culturally responsive teaching is empowering and transformative. These concepts as described by Gay, are like the reflection/action dimensions of critical pedagogy and the education for social justice dimension of multicultural education. Empowerment leads to engagement from students who become successful learners. Empowerment also leads to transformation and the “action” against traditional education that works to assimilate and silence certain students.

Gay argues that culturally responsive teaching is also emancipatory.

Central to this kind of teaching is making authentic knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to students. The validation, information and pride it generates are both psychologically and intellectually liberating (2000, p. 35)

This idea of emancipation connects to the idea that multicultural education is antiracist and anti-discriminatory. Nieto and Bode argue that by multicultural education being antiracist, it forces teachers and students to look at society as how it is, instead of how we would like to see it. Gay’s idea of emancipation focuses on showing what is behind the presumptions of absolute truth and shows students that within a given situation there can be multiple truths.

Geneva Gay states that for culturally responsive teaching to succeed in schools, the teachers and curriculum must also change. She states that teachers

must be well versed in different cultural values and histories of different ethnic groups. They must also have “the courage to stop blaming the victims of school failure” (Gay, 2000, p.44). On top of having courage, Gay also states that teachers must have the tenacity and the will to confront traditional school canons that are hindering students from success.

The freedom that comes from multicultural education or culturally responsive teaching allows for students to recognize the systems in place that prevent them from succeeding like the certain groups in power. Gay does a good job of pointing out how schools fail students from different backgrounds, yet these are still rooted in the idea of monocultural students or students with one ethnic background. However, as shown in the data of Oregon students and the U.S census, the multi-racial population continues to grow. With this in mind, Gay’s argument for culturally responsive teaching must extend to include students with more than one cultural background.

Chapter 3: METHODS

The literature within curriculum studies provides ideas for multicultural education and how this type of curriculum is important for students of color. While multicultural education provides better support for the diverse needs of students, there is little discussion of multi-ethnic students and their needs. The purpose of this thesis is to understand the experiences of multi-ethnic students within the current curriculums in schools and how teachers can support these students. Using the findings of my research I hope to provide teachers with an understanding of the needs of multi-ethnic students. To provide these answers I asked the questions, what is happening now to provide multicultural education, what are the experiences of multi-ethnic students, and how can we build upon multicultural curriculum to address the needs of multi-ethnic students?

Research Design

For the research of this thesis, I wanted to learn more about what the needs of multi-ethnic students were and if our schools were addressing those needs. To find this out, I set out to interview my peers and current teachers in Eugene, Oregon. I interviewed four college-aged students ranging from freshmen to recent graduates and I interviewed two local teachers, one in elementary school and one in high school. These interviews gave me a snapshot into the lives of four specific people. Luckily, I was a board member of the Multi-Ethnic Student Alliance, I had access to more conversations of multi-ethnicity every Monday meeting. From these meetings, I also kept field notes of what other people shared.

By interviewing people, I had access to real experiences of people that I knew on campus and I had firsthand discussions with them about these experiences. The use of interviews allowed for me to have access to the varying experiences of multi-ethnic students. It reminded me that while broad generalizations can be made of any identity group, there are real variances between all participants. Qualitative research was important for this project as it allowed for me to compare and contrast different experiences of my participants. "Second, qualitative research differs because of its ability to represent the views and perspectives of the participants in a study. Capturing their perspectives may be a major purpose of a qualitative study" (Yin, 2011, p. 8) The literature that I used focused on critical pedagogy and also the importance of multicultural education. I used different educators such as Noddings, Nieto, Bode, Cowhey and more to understand the importance of multicultural education for all of our students.

Working with my primary advisor I developed four questions for each of the students, covering how they identified and if they found their schooling experience to be inclusive to their identities (Appendix 1). Through my connections at the University of Oregon I reached out to the student population and asked for participants. For the sake of time, I decided to interview four different students. Each one was from a different background, however three out of four were multi-racial with one White parent, which they acknowledged affected their experiences in school. To understand the side of teachers, I also decided to interview some local teachers in Eugene, Oregon. I found teachers to interview by

asking my high school English teacher and asking my mother's teaching partner to be participants. For the teachers, I focused on learning what they as teachers were doing within their classrooms to address the needs of their multi-ethnic students.

Three out of the four students I interviewed in person while recording our conversation. The fourth student of the group was a graduate and was working in Colorado at the time and so I conducted the interview over phone. By interviewing each student in person or over the phone, I was able to ask follow up questions and get to know them each a little better. The two teachers I talked to were very busy and could not meet with me in person. Therefore, I used e-mail to correspond with them and get their answers.

For the sake of privacy, the names of all participants have been changed.

The Participants: The Students

Finding participants for my study was not very difficult due to my connections on campus at University of Oregon. With my involvement in the Multi-Ethnic Student Alliance, I was able to send out a mass e-mail to the members of the group asking for interview participants. The responses were quick and I was able to get my participants quickly.

Lisa is a freshman at University of Oregon who currently is majoring in Humanities. She identifies as Korean and American, with a mother from Korea and father from America. I met Lisa during a new student retreat in the fall of 2013. We immediately connected, as both of us knew that the other was part Asian without even asking.

Ellie is a sophomore at the University of Oregon majoring in Environmental Sciences while also minoring in Asian studies. Ellie identifies as Latina as well as Guatemalan. She identifies as multi-ethnic in the way that though she is Guatemalan, she was born and raised in the United States and she feels that she identifies with two cultures.

Carl graduated in winter term from the University of Oregon. He studied Environmental studies and also took many Ethnic Studies classes while attending university. He identifies as Native American and White. In his interview, Carl also said he is comfortable using the terms multiracial as well. He has a mixed Native American father and White mother.

Nick is a University of Oregon graduate. He currently teaches 8th graders in Colorado with Teach for America. Nick identifies as Korean and American, he also uses the term non-white to recognize his white passing privilege due to his light skin.

The Teachers

Mrs. Brooks is a fourth/fifth grade English teacher at Yujin Gakuen Japanese Immersion Elementary. She is originally from Oregon and she identifies as white American. At Yujin Gakuen she works with a staff that consists of Japanese teachers as well as other Americans. Her students are as diverse as the staff of the school. Located in north Eugene, there are quite a few Mexican American students and students from lower income homes. However, due to the reputation of the

school as being Japanese immersion there also many students who are Japanese American or are part Japanese.

Ms. Daniels is a literature teacher for Eugene's IB program. I personally had Ms. Daniels for my senior year literature class. Ms. Daniels also identifies as white American and is from Washington. In her work in the IB program Ms. Daniels teaches different literature from around the world that correlates with what topic students learn in their IB history classes. For example, when studying World War II in IB history, in IB literature students read poetry by Russian poet, Anna Akhmatova and Polish poet, Wislawa Szymborska. Due to her job, Ms. Daniels works at multiple high schools each year and works with many different students.

Methods of Analysis

After interviewing the participants, I coded each of the interviews to find the similarities across the different stories. This coding helped me identify certain shared experiences of multi-ethnic students. Also by coding the interviews of the teachers, I was able to compare and contrast the curriculums at the elementary and high school. I then took the opportunity to compare my findings to the literature on multicultural education. By doing this I was able to pinpoint where students benefited from multicultural education and where this curriculum fell short. In order to answer my original research questions, I relied upon the literature from authors like Nieto, to inform what teachers in progressive circles are currently doing to incorporate multicultural and an inclusive curriculum. I then

compared these findings to what the university students shared with me during their interviews.

Researcher Positionality

The benefit being multi-ethnic myself allowed for me to have easier access to other people who identified as multi-ethnic. Many of my own close friends are multi-ethnic and it was not strange for me to have low-key conversations about multi-ethnicity with them. Also attending the Multi-Ethnic Student Alliance's meetings, I had conversations every single week discussing different aspects and different multi-ethnic experiences.

One of the challenges I had in this project was to not make this paper all about me and my experiences. While I used my own stories to introduce ideas, I also made an effort to use my participants' stories as well. Another challenge was to make sure that this paper did not present the experiences of multi-ethnic students as one homogenous experience. This challenge arose, when I realized that many of my participants were part white, who could also pass as white. Through the discussions held within the Multi-Ethnic Student Alliance, I knew that the experiences of multi-ethnic people who were part white had white passing privilege had a different experience compared to others who were not part white.

Conclusion

The methods through which I did my research and analyzed my research helped me pinpoint the similarities and differences within the multi-ethnic students' experiences in school. By interviewing my peers, I was able to compare

their experiences to the goals of multicultural education and progressive teaching methods. By interviewing the teachers, I was able to see how these ideas of multicultural education played out in the curriculum at different schools within Eugene, Oregon.

Chapter 4: THE TEACHERS

This chapter focuses on the experiences of the teachers I interviewed working within the 4j district in Eugene, Oregon. I have organized this chapter in two sections. The first section focuses on how the teachers incorporate multicultural education into their curriculums. The second section focuses on what the teachers do to support self-identified multi-ethnic students within their classrooms.

The individuality of students is deeply entwined with their ethnic identity and cultural socialization. Teachers need to understand very thoroughly both the relationships and the distinctions between these to avoid compromising the very thing they are most concern about – that is, students’ individuality (Gay, 2000, p. 23).

This quote highlights what teachers should keep in mind when working with their students. Taking this quote into account, I used it as a means to compare what the teachers told me they did, to what curriculum theorists want teachers to do in the classroom.

Multicultural Education

This section focuses on how the two teachers interviewed included multicultural education into their classrooms and curriculums.

I interviewed Mrs. Brooks who currently teaches 4th/5th grade combination classes at Yujin Gakuen. The school she works at is unique in the way that it is one of Eugene’s three immersion programs that teaches Japanese language and culture. One of the benefits of Yujin Gakuen is that the students are constantly immersed in a blend of cultures. They spend half of the day with their English teacher, learning

multiple subjects in English like any other elementary school. The rest of their day is spent in Japanese class, where they still learn multiple subjects but in Japanese. In this way the curriculum maintains the “immersion” portion. Within the realm of culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education the immersion system focuses on two cultures, that of the dominant culture of the country and one other culture that is different. The immersion system is unique in that while there are aspects of the foreign culture taught and added into curriculum, the dominant American narrative is still taught in the literature and history. For example, the 4th and 5th graders study the history of Oregon. Previously this had focused on teaching the Oregon Trail and Oregon’s statehood. However, now,

We focus on the 9 Indigenous tribes here in Oregon. We had a woman who works with the Natives program here in 4J come out for three sessions to discuss her tribal lifestyle. She shared with us her personal experience growing up on a reservation as well as indigenous foods, furs, and tools (Brooks, personal communication, March 30, 2014)

I thought about what Carl, a student participant, had said about his experiences in schools learning about Native Americans.

treatment, history of Native peoples of was a “past tense” thing, not like a “present tense” thing. Like, African American history in high school was a present tense thing, even though at my high school, there’s only as many Native students as there are Black students. It’s like, it was definitely like a cultural phenomenon they made Indians happen in the past (Carl, personal communication, February 5, 2014).

In Mrs. Baker’s classroom, students research and study also a variety of other peoples and cultures. In the fall students have a speech project, where the students research another country and share facts and bits of culture to their peers. “The

goal is for students to realize that we are really similar but also very different. I hope they gain an understanding to honor other cultures and also realize the great differences between other ethnic groups and citizens.” (Brooks, personal communication, March 30, 2014)

The authors I have read, such as Nieto and Cowhey argue that multicultural education is antiracist, basic, important for all students, pervasive, for social justice, a process, is critical pedagogy. (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p.44) In her classroom, Mrs. Brooks opens up the curriculum to study other cultures, however does designate the learning to a cultural “celebration”. The idea of cultural celebration is important to clarify here. Multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching focus on developing an understanding and respect of other cultures and ways of thinking. These pedagogies focus on critically understanding what the dominant narrative illuminates and what it hides. Cultural celebrations on the surface can look like multicultural curriculum as it introduces students to different cultures through the holidays, food, music and dance. However, cultural celebrations stop there without engaging in critical discussions as to why for example other cultural histories are not taught in American school curriculums. However, her quote of what she wants students to gain from sharing these facts of other countries, is much deeper than knowing the facts. She wants her students to honor and respect the differences different cultures have. This could be the beginning of a great conversation with students to observe what cultures are taught and what cultures are hidden.

My second teacher participant, Ms. Daniels is a high school literature teacher teaching in the IB (International Baccalaureate) program. In Ms. Daniel's literature classes there is a great emphasis on multicultural literature. "We teach *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *Persepolis*, *Sufi Poetry*, a novel about tenant farming in India, and a set of poems and stories from throughout the centuries in China in the sophomore year." (Daniels, personal communication, April 6, 2014).

Authors, Lukens, Smith and Coffel, who focus on the needs of multicultural literature in schools write,

The literature we offer our children should reflect the population who will be reading it. However, although all children benefit from seeing themselves and others in children's books, these complexities of racial, ethnic, and cultural affinity continue to be a small slice of the children's books published (2013, p. 18).

Ms. Daniels does this in her classroom by incorporating diverse stories in her literature classes. While the IB program focuses on an international curriculum, within the districts teachers as a group get to decide which books to teach each year.

Ms. Daniels specifies that through reading a diverse selection of books, "we try to expand students' knowledge and understanding of the complexity of places that are too easily classified as one in typical American thinking" (Daniels, personal communication, April 6, 2014.) Her quote echoes what Ellie, a student said in her interview, "America does a really good job of creating stereotypes" (Ellie, personal communications, February 2, 2014). By reading and trying to understand the complexity of places, Ms. Daniels works to break stereotypes of other cultures, by encouraging interactions through literature. Geneva Gay states that other

researchers have found that adding cultural diversity to the curriculum offers benefits not only to the minority groups but also mainstream society (2000, p. 26). Culturally relevant teaching works on developing an understanding of different cultural perspectives and recognizing the multiple truths people can have. Gay states that, "Ignorance of people different from ourselves often breeds negative attitudes, anxiety, fear, and the seductive temptation to turn others into images of ourselves" (2000, p. 23). Ms. Daniels recognizes the dangers of this ignorance and so she makes a point of incorporating diverse literature.

Support

Multicultural education is key to helping students feel welcome in the classroom and keeping them engaged. What the teachers told me about their use of multicultural curriculum helped me understand what they were doing. However, I also was curious as to how they knew if they had students who identified as multiethnic and how they supported these students. Both teachers provided a sneak peak of what they each do for their students.

"I treat everyone as an equal human being. However I honor the unique differences that each student brings to the classroom" (Brooks, personal communication, March 30, 2014). When asked how she identifies multi-ethnic students Mrs. Brooks said, "Honestly, I do not identify them...in my everyday classroom I never think of this group of Latinos that need this or this group of native Japanese that need this, or this group of Caucasians that need this" (Brooks, personal communication, March 30, 2014). There is danger in being "colorblind" in

the classroom, however, Mrs. Brooks while states that she treats everyone as an equal human being, supports this idea by not generalizing her students from different ethnic groups. She works to recognize each student individually.

In the classroom at the beginning of the year we talk about who we are. We talk about family traditions and things that are important to each individual family. Some students are very willing to share whereas others are not. I never push those students who do not want to share. Some families their parents come in and talk with me whereas other families I may never see. I really try to honor and value all individual peoples and cultures (Brooks, personal communication, March 30, 2014).

The danger of being “colorblind” is the idea that by stating that a teacher sees all students as humans or equal, erases the cultural differences and the socially structured inequalities that hinder different ethnic groups. “They may fear that talking about race will only exacerbate the problem of racism” (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p. 74). In discussion of colorblindness, Nieto and Bode highlight that this colorblindness starts from a young age, where discussion about racial differences are often discouraged as it is considered “not nice” to talk about someone like that.

As teachers, our classrooms should become safe spaces for all our students regardless of their identity. Mrs. Brooks provides that space, by allowing her students to share and encouraging respect of all individuals. While she does this on a personal level she also encourages respect by incorporating other ethnic groups within her curriculum. While, I didn’t get any information of literature that she teaches to her students, within the immersion program, the students are exposed to literature from Japan and for some this may reflect their cultural background.

Ms. Daniels in her interview was very concerned about her multi-ethnic students.

This has become an interesting issue of late, as some of my students have begun to voice concern that others are not seeing the complexity of their multi-ethnic backgrounds and are therefore inadvertently saying things that are offensive to students with multi-ethnic/multi-racial backgrounds (Daniels, personal communication, April 6, 2014).

It is because of this kind of care, that I think students are comfortable approaching Ms. Daniels with their concerns.

I am thinking about ways to lead activities that ask students to consider the multiple identities with their background and to grow more in recognizing and learning from/about the multiple identities in the backgrounds of others, as different from classifying people (Daniels, personal communication, April 6, 2014).

These kinds of activities are important for all students as identity is nuanced and fluid whether it is between ethnicities or different ways of identifying. Nieto and Bode discuss this in the term hybridity. "Hybridity is a reality in our own country as well as internationally. It refers not simply to mixed-race and ethnic identity, although this is certainly a growing reality" (2008, p. 173). Furthermore they discuss how identity is not only affected by ethnic and cultural background, they have found that young people will also sometimes identify with things from pop culture that may not be from their own ethnic background. This becomes an added layer to the idea of a fluid identity.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the experiences of the teachers and what they do in their current classrooms to address the needs of their multi-ethnic students. Comparing the answers from the interview to curriculum theorists allowed me to see what is still lacking in what some teachers attempt their classrooms. I was also able to see how the teachers took the fluid identity of their students into account during work, while the literature did not explicitly focus on fluid identity. The interviews of the teachers set a foundation that I can refer back to when I analyze the student interviews. I will be able to compare and contrast the school experiences of students to the teachers' efforts in incorporating multicultural curriculum.

Chapter 5: School Experiences

Personal Identification

Three of my participants identified with two racial identities, while one identified with two cultural identities. Each student liked to identify with his or her own specific racial identities, such as “I, mainly identify myself as Korean and American” (Lisa, personal communication, March 11, 2014). With my interviews I came to find that identity was fluid and usually situational for my peers. For example, Carl in response to the first question said,

So I think that depends on, it's a circumstantial thing, I guess. I definitely identify as Native American. I'm enrolled in a tribe, um and I grew up ethnically Indian and practice the same cultural beliefs, like, in that community... Um, but then I also identify as White, because I'm light-skinned and my mom is White (Carl, personal communication, February 5, 2014)

However, later Carl also states, “the reason I identify myself as a multiracial person is that it's the reality of situation” (Carl, personal communication, February 5, 2014). Within a span of a couple minutes, Carl claimed identity within three different groups, Native American, White and multiracial. This highlights how identity is something that is fluid and can constantly change. Nick, a graduate said, “So it, uh, depends on the context” (Nick, personal communication, February 2, 2014).

Recently, um, I've been using, well it depends on the context, I never identify as just American or Korean. But more often I've been identifying less as a person of color and more as 'non-white'. Which is kind of a negative, but um, I've been identifying less with the terminology person of color, because it brings up a particular, um, visual implication... I use 'non-white' because, not because of the

pigmentation of my skin necessarily, but rather the experience you have as a person due to the virtue of the pigment of your skin (Nick, personal communication, February 2, 2014).

I myself answer similarly to the identity question. For the most part I identify as mixed Japanese and American. However, when I feel that people will judge me for my race, I just say American or mixed. For example, during the very first MESA meeting of spring 2014, we had a meeting called “Shit People Say”. This meeting focused on the questions many of us face as multi-ethnic people. A very common question is, “What are you?” or “Where are you from?” During this discussion I made a point saying that sometimes I get so frustrated with other people trying to box me into a racial category, to mess with them, I just say American or that I’m from Oregon.

Another participant Ellie stated that currently she identifies as Latin American and tries to put her Latina identity out in front of her American identity (Ellie, personal communication, February 2, 2014). However in her interview she told me how her way of identifying changed when she moved from Los Angeles to Portland, Oregon.

As far as like, struggles with identifying myself that started, I don’t know, because of the income change, I feel that like I tried to grade that down a little bit. Like, ‘Oh no, I was born in America.’ And you know blah blah blah. I think so, I tried to play that down a little bit during I think freshman year of high school. Or like sophomore year of high school was when I started changing back, to turning into the person I am right now. (Ellie, personal communication, February 2, 2014)

This was the trend I saw overwhelmingly with my interviewees and members of MESA. For most students, the question of identity did not start to concern them

until middle or high school. Once in college, however, many found the vocabulary and community to express their identities.

Negative and Positive Experiences in Society and School

Most people at some point have had a negative experience due to their identity at some point. However, for many students of color it can be everyday.

I had no way of understanding, nor did my friend have a way of articulating, the very racial exclusion they faced everyday.” They learned whitewashed curricula from teachers who favored white students, and lived in a society that invalidated people of color as less worthy and certainly less intelligent than white people (Knaus, 2006, p. 89).

This quote written by a white scholar offers insight into what students of color face in classrooms. However, when students who are multi-ethnic are asked of their negative experiences, I saw a trend of how due to how they looked, people acted differently around them. For example, Carl, who identifies as Native American and White said,

Coming from the White community, the negative experiences always, um, people are more comfortable being racist if they think you’re White. So I’ve been put into situations where people will say like, inappropriate things. And, it’s, it puts a lot of pressure on you whether or not you want to respond, or how you respond, or you’re going to be complicit or not (Carl, personal communication, February 5, 2014).

This is an example of what a lot of people within the multi-ethnic community call passing. The idea of passing is that the individual due to their phenotype looks more White than their peers of color. With this ability to pass come certain benefits and also repercussions. For example, “So I’m racially Native American, I’m also ethnically Native American, but at the same time I think it’s disingenuous to

claim like all of the day to day struggles that people with darker skin have to deal with. So that's one reason that I'm like comfortable identifying myself as multi-racial." (Carl, personal communication, February 5, 2014) However as shown with the earlier quote by Carl, passing as White in his case, also meant that he was exposed to microaggressive statements by other people who are White.

Similar to Carl, Nick felt that not having the same experiences as people of color took away his credibility to identify as a person of color. In order to respect those experiences, he chose to use the term "non-white" to identify himself. This observation of the privileges that come with having lighter skinned is a sentiment that I heard repeated throughout conversations in MESA meetings and personal conversations with fellow multiethnic friends.

Lisa stated in her interview that from a young age she has always identified as Korean and American. "I think when I was younger though, there was more emphasis on the Korean part. Maybe? Just because I looked more Korean" (Lisa, personal communication, March 11, 2014). Her negative experiences as a younger child actually were tied to how she identified herself, "when I younger, kids would always be 'Are you Chinese or Japanese' and then, saying, 'Oh, she's so smart because she's Asian' (Lisa, personal communication, March 11, 2014).

Lisa's quote brings up another concept, which I like to call the guessing game. The guessing game is a series of questions that many monoracial people ask multiracial people to fit them into the predetermined racial categories. Ellie, though monoracial herself, due to her outward appearance has experienced the guessing game.

I think you're Mexican, but I don't know, because you don't really sound like it or look like it" and I'm like "The what do I look like?" "You look like you're White" or I've gotten, like during the winter I kind of lighten up a lot and my hair used to be like a lot blonder. It started to get darker as I grew up. Um, so at some points I got, Russian, I got White. When I was in elementary school I got that I was White. (Ellie, personal communication, February 2, 2014).

Ellie stated that one of the negative experiences that she frequently experiences is the racism against Mexicans and fellow Latin Americans.

I remember being on the MAX in Portland and you know how they have the bilingual announcements, like 'don't cross the tracks' in Spanish. I remember being on there and someone, well I was with a group of friends, and one of the guys was like, 'I don't why these damn, like, Mexicans need uh their announcements in Spanish. They should know English, blah, blah, blah' You know, and I'm like, 'Uhhh no.' and so it was little things like that, that I kept hearing from different people. (Ellie, personal communication, February 2, 2014)

While this incident happened out in public, within school Ellie said she experienced negative stereotypes based off of TV shows representations of Latin Americans.

Within Curriculum

"Though the U.S. has never fully included all people much less all categories of people, philosophers, politicians, educators, and researchers have long argued that the goal of education is to prepare citizens for participation in democratic society" (Knaus, 2006, p.11). The curriculum in most American schools supports a monoracial or White culture. Our history is Eurocentric and focused mostly on the achievements of White men. "Oftentimes, whatever is white is treated as normal" (Au, 2009, p.10). This kind of curriculum not only excludes students of color, it also

excludes multi-ethnic students, who may not fall into the category of people of color.

This exclusion was reflected in the stories given during the interview. All four of the students gave a resounding “NO” when I asked if they ever saw themselves reflected in their school curriculum.

“I feel like when we learned about other countries, it was just, ‘These people are like separate little bubbles that keep to themselves, like we do. They do these things.’ Or whenever people who were mixed came up, it was always about Black and White and like, or imperialism. So the context wasn’t very nice either” (Lisa, personal communication, March 11, 2014).

Lisa’s comment on the negative context of mixed race people connects directly to the racist history of the United States and the laws that upheld concepts like the one-drop rule, which benefited the White American society by keeping people of color subjugated. In recent years this idea of blood quantum has affected certain Native Americans and their ability to claim relation to Native tribes. (Milloy, 2014) While the United States no longer uses blood quantum to categorize people, multi-ethnic people, particularly multiracial people still experience the effects of people using blood quantum to justify their existence. Carl discussed the negative experiences he had growing up within the Native community being lighter skinned. “Definitely as a kid, you can get, just kids are nasty to each other, right. So, then like, you can get some Indian kids will be nastier to lighter skinned Native kids” (Carl, personal communication, February 5, 2014).

Native American people are not treated very kindly by the American curriculum. For example in the Columbus narrative, Bill Bigelow states that the

portrayal of Columbus in some children's literature is very deceiving. "Unlike the people he will later exterminate, Columbus is treated as a real human being, one with thoughts and feelings" (Au, 2009, p. 76). Carl, identifying as Native American commented "history of Native peoples was a 'past tense' thing, not like a 'present tense' thing...It's like, it was definitely like a cultural phenomenon they made Indians happen in the past" (Carl, personal communication, February 5, 2014). By presenting Native peoples in the past, Carl is denied his lived experiences by his teachers and his school. Carl also pointed out how even in his college experiences, within his Environmental classes he found that Native Americans were idealized. In reference to environmentalism Carl found a lot of sentiment that stated, "like, if the Indians did it, then it must be a solution standpoint"(Carl, personal communication, February 5, 2014).

One of the themes I found in my interviews was the pressure on multi-ethnic people to educate others about stereotypes. For example, Lisa recounted an experience from elementary school.

One time in my art literacy class in elementary school we were doing, like, a scroll. But that kind of bugged me, because there were these stamps that had Chinese characters written on them and they, these, they were three or four stamps and they were used for, um, the same one used for the Chinese art literacy, Japanese art literacy, and then Korean art literacy. And they did, they all shared Chinese characters, but at the same time, I was really pissed off, like, 'This isn't Korean!' Like, but, I was telling the teacher that and she was like, 'Oh well, oh well' So I got really mad. (Lisa, personal communication, March 11, 2014)

While Lisa shared an experience from elementary school, Carl shared that even when he attending the University of Oregon, he still experienced the “pressure to educate”.

And just talking to my peers around that, I would say pretty much every class that I’ve had as an environmental studies student would involve like one or two class discussions that was about an Indigenous issue that would involve somebody saying something off color or just ignorant, basically I would just have to like, talk about, and the part that makes it a struggle or a difficult experience is that because I’m not dark skinned there’s a, there’s a window of time where I either feel obligated to identify before making my statement, “I’m Indian” or not (Carl, personal communication, February 5, 2014)

Carl also was very critical of the way Natives are treated in academia. He stated that in college, whole departments such as anthropology are problematic in their views of Native people and that there is a severe lack of positive treatment of Native people.

These experiences of the students highlight the different ways that they see themselves and their existence in the world. By having access to different funds of knowledge from different backgrounds, the students were critical of how teachers treat and teach multicultural students. The recognition that our curriculums still have a ways to go before education can be fully inclusive is important for me as a future educator. Much like Nieto and Bode said that multicultural education is a process, from my interviews, I feel that while there have been leaps and strides towards inclusivity, there is still much more to cover.

Chapter 6: How Can Teachers Support All Students

Knowing that multiple dimensions encompass multicultural education is very important for teachers to take into account when trying to create a more inclusive environment. There are different levels at which different schools are at in their multicultural education. There are some that still focus on celebrating other cultures, while others have progressed to have multicultural perspectives permeate throughout the whole curriculum.

When I asked my participants who were multi-ethnic what they would say to teachers today, there was a call for more culturally sensitive pedagogy and more representations of other cultures within the curriculum. Carl stated, “there’s a way to talk about race in America and in education that is comfortable for um, basically White people. Where it’s a comfortable narrative and that’s really dominant” (personal communication, February 5, 2014). His concern was that while in our curriculum there is recognition of race and racism, it is not an active conversation. Nieto and Bode warn against an education that stops at inclusivity. They argue that, “Teaching does not become more honest and critical simply by becoming more inclusive (2008, p. 45). They argue that in order for education to be fully multicultural, teachers and students need to see and understand exactly what racism is and how it works in our society.

In her interview, Ellie made the point that for her, she would like to see a history curriculum that is not Eurocentric or as sanitized as it is today. She felt that because of this sanitation, White students could not fully understanding the

experiences of those oppressed through the use of racism and other forms of discrimination. Also she felt that on the flip side, students of color were not able to access fully the history of their peoples by having a white-washed and sanitized curriculum. Her suggestion for teachers also included listening to students and what they have to offer. She echoes the ideas of funds of knowledge that every person carries with them in society. Ellie wished that teachers would acknowledge all of the experiences of all the students.

Multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching echo these requests put forth by students. These theories show that when students are engaged and included, antiracist and social justice work is possible. The possibilities of multicultural education are evident in Mary Cowhey's work with her elementary school students. Together, Cowhey and her students openly discussed differences in ways of thinking, acting and believing. Even at such young ages, Cowhey was able to help her own students develop critical thinking skills that they then used to look at the history curriculum or what is read in literature.

In my interview with Mrs. Brooks, she discussed in her answer how in her class her students are exposed to literature from around the world and especially within her school, the students are immersed in Japanese culture for half of the school day. "We always embrace and celebrate student's unique differences in lifestyles within their own culture" (Brooks, personal communication, March 30, 2014). This statement shows how Mrs. Brooks works within her classroom to validate her students' lives and experiences.

Ms. Daniels was more critical about including her students' voices within the curriculum in her classroom. She stated that the idea of multiple identities is an important concept that she wants to share with all of her students. She was also very proactive within her classroom beginning this conversation. Her own students approached her to present to their classes about their own cultural identities, and Ms. Daniels said, "I'm supporting students in this, but I'd like to do more" (personal communication, April 6, 2014).

I think it is much easier to engage in these conversations with students in older grades as the students begin to define their own identities. However, creating an antiracist and inclusive curriculum is something that can begin from kindergarten. Beginning by making observations of the differences between people is a great way to observe and critique stereotypes. By beginning young and utilizing the curiosity of students, everyone has the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills that can be utilized for the rest of their lives.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis began as a journey to understand how multi-ethnic students were represented within the American school curriculum. My research of different educational theories and access to the Multi-Ethnic Student Alliance at University of Oregon greatly helped me understand the issues that multi-ethnic students face during their education. This thesis helped me articulate the ideas I held of my own identity as well as what kind of teaching philosophy I would like to take with me into my future classroom.

Identities of people are highly intricate and complicated; they are different person to person. The theories of multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching serve teachers with a basis for understanding each and every student that comes through their door. These theories open the discussion to understand how race, ethnicity, class, gender and other identities affect students. However in regards to multi-ethnic students care must be taken to understand how the multiple ethnicities intertwine and interact within a student. History of race must also be taken into account with all students. Further, this care should also be extended to all students. While there are statistics for Black, Latino, Asian, and other students, teachers must not impose assumptions upon any student based on just their ethnic background. Personal connection and understanding of each student will ultimately lead to success in education for all students of diverse backgrounds.

Appendix 1: Interviews

Questions for Students

1. How do you identify yourself? Why? A) struggles/liberation with your self-identification
2. Did you have negative experiences due to your identity? b) School experiences? Negative? Positive?
3. Did you see yourself in the school curriculum?
4. If you could tell your teachers or a group of teachers what you would like to see in the curriculum concerning multi-ethnicity, what would you say?

Questions for Teachers

1. How do you include multicultural education within your curriculum?
2. How do you support your self-identified multi-ethnic/multi-racial students within your classroom? How do you identify these students? Through activities?
3. What skills should teachers have/utilize when working with self-identified multi-ethnic students?

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